

**Education Committee
Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

House Bill 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators - Support

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Nichole Senelick, and I am a resident of Tolland. I work as a ISS/Detention Paraeducator in Tolland Middle School in the Tolland School District. I offer the following testimony in support of HB 6881, An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators:

Paraeducators are on the front lines of student learning. We provide one-on-one assistance, reinforce instruction, classroom management, and support all levels of learners. We celebrate when our students succeed and try to redirect them when they act out. Despite the important roles we play, we are the lowest paid staff members in our schools. We cannot afford our health care; we don't get paid on summer vacation or extended school breaks, and cannot collect on unemployment during these times. We cannot retire with dignity and many of us have to work a second or third job. It is no wonder paraeducators are leaving in droves. More than 1,300 paraeducator positions are vacant throughout the state. HB 6881 is an important step in improving the work, life, and career opportunities of Connecticut's paraeducators. But most of all, it is an opportunity to treat paraeducators with the respect and dignity we have earned.

In a typical school day, I monitor the hall, monitor lunch detention, as well as after school detention which is held until 3:30 PM. I also fill in in the classroom as a substitute if we are short on coverage. I also monitor the In School Suspension (ISS), which consists of assisting students in an alternate setting outside of the classroom in their daily assignments. I have also worked in the Applied Behavior (aba) room as a one-on-one para, which consists of assisting special needs students with physical needs, modifying assignments, and assisting with adaptive tech for communication needs. I also assist them in hygiene and bathroom needs.

I make a little above minimum wage and have had to take second part time jobs and summer jobs, as well as summer school and crowd control for school sports. It is still not enough to help supplement a two-income household. If it was not for my husband's military benefits, we would be able to support our medical or car insurance.

I have minimal training for my position, but feel the professional development we receive is of little benefit to us or our students. We are not given the training we need which will allow us to help our students.

While we can attend PPTs, that only happens if the parent invites us. And, too often, the parents are not well informed of that information. We also have access to IEPs, but only for the one-on-ones, and it is not very well known that paras can access them. As I stated earlier, I also serve as a substitute in the classrooms when there is a need. When I do, that means there is no one filling my regular position with my students. This can result in little consequence to major discipline behaviors. I have also had to be a two-on-one para to students that need a

one-on-one, because of the staffing shortage. This has affected all paras because we cannot meet our personal needs, or the student's needs.

I like that if HB 6881 becomes the law, paras will be more involved in training and planning for PPTs and IEPs. Afterall, we are the ones that are with the student on a daily and one-on-one basis. I also like that the bill provides for a livable wage for all paras.

I am proud to be paraeducator because we build wonderful relationships with our students, and nothing can compare to seeing a student succeed and thrive.

I urge committee members to support HB 6881.

Nichole Senelick
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